

ADOLPH POSTEL SR.

SUMMARY: Adolph Postel Sr. talks to Pat Jasper about growing up in Magnolia Park and making a career at the Houston Ship Channel. Being a longshoreman at a time when no technology was used. He describes how grain was loaded onto a ship. He also talks about his job on the port railroad. He also describes the social environment back then when discrimination and segregation was prevalent.

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February 27, 2012

Home

Adolph Cuadralles Postel. Born July 10. 1927. Was born 10 blocks from Turning Basin. Left school at 15 to find a job, first job was in the Houston shipyard during WW2. When war was over jobs got scarce and got laid off but continued to work around there. Any kind of maintenance work. Did some painting. Then later on got job on and off as longshoreman. At 24 got job as porter on railroad as part of Port of Houston. Labor, truck driver, making very little money. Started out with \$1.34 an hour. Cleaning and greasing engines. got promoted as an engineer after 20 years. Retired in 1989 after 38 years of service. Been retired 23 years. Best job of my life. Family - dad was a longshoreman. some brothers worked for port. Sailed a few times before working on railroad,

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Port terminal assoc railroad. When starting out there had 6-8 locomotives, When left had 18 locomotives. There is a merchandise terminal. Refineries on both sides of the channel are supplied by the port railroad channel. All industries up and down the port get their merchandise from port terminal railroad.

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Longshoreman unload the ship and load them on box cars, flat cars, etc. Longshoreman load and unload the ship. Get a lot of grain in Houston. Sometimes 120 box cars of grain. Take them to the grain elevator.

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Special cars for most things. Cars to bring automobiles in. can put 15-20 on a trailer.

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Now there are a lot of Latinos working. Back then they just did the dirty work. Loading grain, coal. White folks had the authority back then.

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Would have to go down to the ILA. See job posted, details of the times etc. Sometimes would take 2-3 days to load the ship.

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Separate locals. Think the Latinos were mixed with the white locals. But would not hire that many Latinos. Had two different gangs, Black and white. Ship was divided in half between black and white.

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Was one of the first Latinos to run a locomotive. Some politician was helping the Latinos. Wanted to see how many engineers were there. There were no blacks or Latinos. He put two blacks and two Latinos on the engine service. Good paying job.

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Run the locomotive, pull the trains, sort the trains out. Ground crew had a list of what was to be done and they would tell us. Had 2-3 men on the ground who would do the heavy work regardless of how bad the weather. Sometime had to work at 6.30 in the morning. Had to get up at 5 and be there by 6am. Sometimes had to start by switching or sorting the cars out. Had to work 8-9 hours. and had to be pretty alert. Worked with hand signals and at night worked off a lamp. Then the radios came in. ..Once pulled a train with 130 loaded cars of grain. Come up the ship channel and go through Manchester Terminal to Equity Grain elevator. This was an accident, too much power, four big engines. Train broke apart in two places. Couplings came loose. Was not an accident. Made a mistake.

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Sometimes the air holes starts leaking and the train comes to a full stop. Have to isolate the engine with the problem so the traffic can get by.

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Supply refineries, grain elevators, warehouses to both sides of the Port of Houston. Port terminal railroad supplies all the industries from the Turning Basin to Barbers Cut. Big grain elevator at Barbers cut.

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"Engineer job was good for me." Seamen's job, hardest part of it was being away from family for extended periods of time. Made a few trips overseas. Going through the Suez canal and back through the Panama canal is called a round the world trip.

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Being a seamen is a rough job. Especially for a married man. Make good money but don't see family for months. Been in Magnolia Park the whole life. Lost two older sons and one younger son about 6 years ago. One drowned, the others lost to alcohol.

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Have lifelong friends. Swap sea stories. Father born in Victoria, TX. Grandfather came to Brownsville, Cross the border in the early 1900's. Dad was born in Victoria in 1906. Mother's family was from Louisiana. Corales was one of the first Latino policeman in the city of Houston.

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TX city disaster.

Was on a boat then and couldn't leave the port because of the disaster. In 1947, was 20 years old.

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Was raised poor. Did not see any big stores around Magnolia Park. Few people owned cars. There was discrimination against Latinos and Blacks. Because of the proximity of Magnolia Park to Turning Basin, going to work at the port came naturally. Back then very few Latinos worked at the Port. Then got sea-men's docs and made a few trips in early 20's. Stayed at the railroad for 30 years. Did on and off work for longshoreman. Describes how to load grain as a longshoreman. Could fill a ship in 2-3 days. Would work 10 hr days.

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Did not need technology for that. Just hands and a shovel. Like a big scoop. They would pour the grain out. Someone would scoop it to the side. (gestures) 12-14 men would work together. "Would work wherever they put you."

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After WW2 discrimination eased up. They were allowed to work at the Port. They were even separated at the railroad. There were 2 Latino and 2 black workers at the railroad. The rest of them were white. There aren't too many Latinos working at the Port Railroad. Mostly white. "They run the show down there."